



Jennifer Ellis, ConnCAN
Regarding
Education Committee, Senate Bill 455 and House Bill 5451
March 14, 2018

Members of the Education Committee, Co-Chairs Rep. Fleischmann, Sen. Slossberg, Sen. Boucher and Ranking Member Rep. Lavielle, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Jennifer Ellis, I am the Director of Research and Policy for ConnCAN, a statewide non-profit organization that has spent the last decade fighting to ensure that all kids in our state have access to a great public education.

Today, I am here to express our **support for Senate Bill 455, An Act Concerning Minority Teacher Recruitment and Retention**, and to offer recommendations for improving this important piece of legislation. I am also here in **opposition to House Bill 5451, An Act Concerning Funding for Regional Agricultural Science and Technology Education Centers**.

SB 455 contains critical proposals that would introduce innovation and amend our current educator certification system to improve our state's minority teacher recruitment and retention efforts.

The research is clear. The quality of a child's classroom teachers and school leaders is the top factor impacting his or her success in school. Research also shows that students of color perform better in school when taught by teachers of color. However, while nearly half (45%) of all Connecticut public school students are children of color, fewer than 10 % of our teachers and school leaders are people of color.

We must improve this disparity. That's why we support efforts to ensure that Connecticut's certification requirements are strongly connected to effectiveness in the classroom, maximize our ability to compete with neighboring states for talented candidates, and avoid overly prescriptive mandates that tie the hands of leaders who want to pursue innovative and effective recruiting techniques. Right now, our

certification requirements exclude too many well-trained, promising, and diverse candidates from teaching or leading in our state, especially in shortage or in-demand areas.

Section 1 of SB 455 is a broad directive for the Department of Education, in consultation with the Minority Teacher Recruitment Policy Oversight Council, to identify, develop, and support innovative programs and practices that enhance minority teacher recruitment and retention. In doing so, we urge the Department to address Connecticut's certification requirements that are currently a barrier to attracting and retaining a diverse educator workforce.

Specifically, we support the measures in SB 455, Section 1 that would promote: utilizing innovative methods to attract talent (particularly in shortage areas; eliminating obstacles to professional certification to increase state competitiveness; and supporting teacher preparation programs that commit to enrolling higher numbers of minority teachers and supporting interstate reciprocity.

We also support SB 455, Sections 2 and 6, which would provide needed flexibility for the Department of Education to certify candidates who show demonstrated experience and subject-area mastery, instead of requiring specific input-based requirements that do not ensure quality or success in the classroom.

Our state does not have enough teachers to meet demand in our highest-need communities and in many critical subject areas, such as math, science, special education, and bilingual education. Every year, about 6 of every 10 unfilled teaching positions exist due to lack of qualified candidates. This results in chronically vacant teaching positions, which disproportionately impact our most vulnerable students. Many school districts across the state report they are losing talented candidates to other states or private schools because potential educators have not met coursework, testing, or degree requirements that have little to do with their ability to serve as effective educators.

Additionally, we support SB 455, Sections 3 and 4 that would amend Charter School Educator Permits, tailoring requirements to specific candidates to get more qualified teachers in the classroom and creating a pathway to certification for effective educators. We urge you to further refine the proposal to grant professional certification, instead of provisional certification, to teachers who can demonstrate effectiveness and a commitment to continued education and professional development.

Provisional certification is time-limited and requires that candidates obtain a Master's degree before moving to renewable, professional certification. A growing body of research shows, however, that Master's degrees have limited value as a predictor of educator effectiveness. This section needs to be amended to ensure that no child loses access to a great, committed educator because of input-based requirements not tied to effectiveness in the classroom.

Additionally, these sections should be amended to make clear that they apply to teachers, leaders, and administrators serving under a Charter School Educator Permit, not just teachers.

Finally, we oppose HB 5451, which would take critical funding away from public school children because of the public school they chose to attend. Removing millions of dollars in critical funding, as proposed by HB 5451, will hurt public school children, the majority of whom are diverse and low-income students, whose families have exercised their choice for a high-performing charter school.

The primary responsibility of Connecticut's public education system is to provide every child the opportunity to get a high-quality education, no matter where he or she lives. Charter schools are an essential part of this effort.

As you know, we continue to use 11 different ways to fund schools not based on students' needs but on school type. Because of this illogical and outdated method of funding our schools, public charter school students remain among the most underfunded students in the entire state. Public charter schools do not receive weighted funding for low-income students or for students who are English Language Learners like their traditional district counterparts. Additionally, charter schools are required to do more with less--covering the costs of their own facilities and other professional and management services from their per pupil funding. Connecticut's is one of only two states where charter schools are funded by an entirely separate budget line item that has little to do with student need. If we funded all students fairly, based on their learning needs in a single funding formula, we could move away from harmful proposals like HB 5451.

Doing so would help students and our state close our pervasive achievement gaps. Despite their inequitable funding, charter schools in Connecticut are providing students, particularly students who need it most, with a high quality education. Currently, over 90% of Connecticut's nearly 10,000 charter school students are

students of color, while over 70% are low-income. Overall, 83 percent of Connecticut's public charter schools perform better than schools in their host districts in ELA and 78 percent perform better in math, based on the most recent SBAC annual assessment results. That's more third graders reading well and prepared to succeed in later grades, and more 12th graders prepared to succeed in college and career. In fact, in some of our public charter schools in our lowest performing school districts in Connecticut, 100 percent of students who graduate go on to college. Those results are why over 6,900 children in Connecticut are on wait lists to send their children to attend these high-quality education options.

Our children can't wait. To ensure all students have access to effective educators and high-quality educational options, we encourage this Committee to support SB 455 with our suggested amendments and to support further legislation that streamlines our certification system, prioritizes job performance over input-based requirements, and opens innovative pathways into the profession to attract a diverse and experienced workforce. We also strongly encourage this Committee to oppose HB 5451, to ensure that all children in Connecticut receive access to a great public education that is equitably funded.

Thank you.